THE WAY IT WAS

By GEORGE HIBBARD

SIGOURNEY ROTHES smiled as he gazed about the room in which he stood. And yet the place was not one that would seem likely to evoke any signs of merriment. Indeed, the prospect was extremely depressing. From wall to wall the space was the narrowest. The floor was bare and large stains showed in the low ceiling. The one small-paned window gave a glimpse over dark, dismal roofs, and, through a tangle of telegraph wires, of a small patch of gray sky. Still Rothes smiled. Then, going to the door to see that it was securely fastened, he took a gold-banded cigarette from a gold case which he drew from a pocket of his shabby coat and, seating himself in the one stiff chair that the room contained, he began to smoke.

And yet very little had occurred.

At the foot of the stairs he met her. The event had not been dramatic. Still, he looked upon it as an adventure. She had just entered the building and, hurrying around a corner, the basket which she carried had been knocked from her hands. The contents were scattered on the floor before her. The objects that met his gaze were simple and commonplace enough. The brown paper parcel had contained meat, a loaf of bread, and some potatoes which had rolled into the farthest corner. Clearly she was bringing home dinner—breakfast—perhaps both, and had met with this accident. Rothes thought of the heroine of the Broken Jug as he saw her suddenly standing still amid the disaster. Only she was not at all mournful. On the contrary, she appeared extremely angry.

"Oh!" she exclaimed indignantly.

"May I help you?" asked Rothes, hurrying forward.

She did not answer at once, and he picked up the loaf of bread and pursued a particularly nimble potato behind a distant door.

"Thank you," she said as he stood before her with his hands filled with the useful tubers.

He had noticed how charming she was, and he gave a sigh of relief as he realized that her voice was soft and low.

"Let me carry the basket upstairs," he said.

"Perhaps you think I am not to be trusted with it. I am so careless," she replied, examining him.

"It's heavy—much too heavy for you," he said decidedly. "You should not give yourself such a load."

"But if I have to," she answered, not sadly, but even laughing a little.

The piteousness of poverty, thought Rothes. Here was this pretty young creature compelled to bear such burdens while her more fortunate sisters had all care taken from them. He felt newly indignant at the social anomaly. And she laughed pleasantly about it. Here was independence—self-dependence. Here was simple contentment. Here was refreshing naturalness. Here was the charm of nature itself. Rothes felt newly glad that he had made this departure and entered into the life where such things and such beings were to be found.

"You don't if I am to carry it," he replied, taking the burden from her slightly resisting hands.

"Oh, well," she said, as if excusing herself to herself, "we are neighbors."

"Are we?" he exclaimed delightedly. "Then I like—the neighborhood."

She smiled on him gravely and for some reason he felt rebuked for his speech. What a manner, he reflected, this daughter of the tenements had, to be sure. No great lady in her drawing room could have imposed her will more easily and more surely.

"You have just come here?" she said, in a way that made the remark a question.

"Yes," he replied lightly. "I—I'm out of a job just now, and waiting for work."

"What is your trade?" she asked, with a kindly interest.

Rothes almost laughed.

"I—I——" he began. "Oh, I'm a gas fitter," he answered," as the single gas jet in the hall caught his eye.

"And you lost your place?"

"There was a strike," he went on more glibly. "I went out and wasn't taken back. And you?"

He felt that it must be in accordance with the situation to ask the question—quite as in a country house he might have asked a strange young woman what form of sport she affected.

"I," she said easily. "I'm in a book bindery."

"And you like the—occupation?" he asked politely.

"The hours are good," she said, with the same little puzzling laugh; "and the work is light, but there's not much chance for getting on."

Rothes was enchanted. It was not the same old thing—the same talk about the same subjects. There was not only surprising novelty in the theme but in the surroundings.

"Thank you," she said, as she paused before a door in one of the upper halls. "I live here," and she held out her hand for the basket.

Reluctantly Rothes gaves it into her keeping.

"I shall see you again," he said tentatively.

"I am very busy." Then she added, laughing, as if amused by her own thoughts: "My—cousin, with whom I live, wouldn't like to have me talking to young men."

"But we're neighbors," urged Rothes. "And you know all about me."

"Do I?" she asked pointedly.

"Well, you know that I am a neighbor—and a gas fitter. That I'm just now out of a job, that I'm called—James Walker."

"I didn't know that," she said.

"That's what I'm called," he said with meaning.

"Oh," she exclaimed. "You mean that you don't know my name. You may call me Nettie Collins."

"Miss Collins," said Rothes, "you are now aware of my occupation and my name, and my place of abode and manner of living, and, when one comes to think of it, isn't that about all that one knows about anybody?"

"Really—that's true," said Miss Collins, thoughtfully. "Oh, it's such a strange world."

"Yes," said Rothes, discontentedly. "Here were you and I so close together, and not knowing it!"

"I don't see anything strange in that," objected Miss Collins.

"Well, perhaps there isn't," Rothes admitted, doubtfully. "One can't tell."

"I think that you are very strange," she said, decidedly.

"Do you?" he asked. "People have thought that before. But when you know me better you'll find that it isn't anything. Really, Miss Collins, you'll have to know me to find out."

"Do you think that it would be worth while—just for that?" she demanded.

"There might be other things," he responded.

The door opened and a stout, elderly woman stood upon the threshold. She scowled upon Rothes, and looked reproachfully upon Miss Collins.

"Good morning, Mr. Walker," cried the girl. "I am so much obliged to you."

She entered the room, and the door was immediately and abruptly closed by the elderly woman who had opened it.

"May a hippogriff seize the old party," muttered Rothes. "Even in the simplicity of the slums there seem to be dragons of duennas."

And then, as he sat in his small room, he thought of her. Netti Collins! The daughter of the people. What if she were? No one could be prettier than she, and he felt no one could be dearer and sweeter and truer. How charming she appeared in the ugly place! How simply and with what merry dignity she had carried herself! The thing had happened before, and will happen again, and it was happening to Rothes even then. He knew that he loved her. Such a mingling of reverence and longing he had never known before, and he understood that a new existence was beginning for him. Who that knew him would believe it? He could hardly believe it himself, but still there was the all-compelling feeling. There was the wish to see her again—the determination that he would see her, the conviction that it was necessary to his happiness that he should see her many times—always.

This was the first of numerous meetings. In the beginnings she sought to avoid him, but gradually, as he persisted with respectful determination in putting himself in her way, she appeared to yield to circumstance and let him talk to her, walk with her and accompany her to the door, and, on one great occasion, pass beyond the threshold.

The room was bare and dull. Still he recognized a refinement in its neatness and simplicity. Nor was it without a bit of color from a simple rug in one place. And on the walls hung a photograph or two in slight wood frames. Rothes gazed about him, delighted. The place was exactly such as he should have desired it to be, in which he should have liked to find her living.

"My cousin is in the next room," she explained, primly, "and she is just going to bring me some tea. Can't I give you some?"

Rothes stared. He could almost imagine himself in a drawing-room in quite a different part of the town. Here was this pretty girl offering him the usual tea at the usual hour. To be sure, she was dressed in the roughest, simplest manner. As he glanced down, he saw the cracked boards in the floor, the cheap paper on the walls, the stove. But what did dress matter? How much could the bare floor count? Had he not dropped hopefully into this unknown world, and had he not been justified? Was there not standing before him the prettiest, dearest maiden that he had ever beheld? What did it matter if her shoes were old? They were the smallest. What did anything matter but she—she, and again she?

"Thank you," he said, dropping on to a hard chair.

"Do you know," she continued, as she brought the cups and saucers and busied herself with the teapot, "I have never known a gas-fitter exactly like you?"

"Have you known many?" he demanded, as he watched her small hands deal easily with the coarse crockery.

"Not many," she replied. "Indeed, I believe that you are the very first. Still, you are not what my idea of a gas-fitter would be."

"And you have an idea—an ideal, perhaps?"

"Hardly," she laughed. "But if I were going to have one——. Honestly, you puzzle me. You speak differently and you behave differently and better."

"Because a man is a laborer he does not have to be a lout," answered Rothes, with a manner to bring the applause from the upper gallery.

"That's what I've always said," she eagerly assented. "If people only knew, I am sure that they would find that in the poorest surroundings there were intelligence and taste and niceness."

"But you——" he went on; "frankly, I never supposed a young woman in a bookbindery was like you."

"Why not?" she demanded, promptly and peremptorily.

"Your voice," he began, "and your hands and—all."

"Might I ask why you thought that book-binders were any more unfortunate than other young women who work for their living?"

"I didn't," he exclaimed, hurriedly. "I thought that they were all different."

"Didn't you know?" she insisted. "Sure you must have seen lots of working girls—only those, indeed."

"No," he answered, quickly. "I've seen others, when I'm there for jobs—going about in the big houses uptown. And now I see you and you are just like them, only a thousand times prettier, and with prettier manners——"

"You think that I am like the young ladies uptown that you see in the great houses?"

"Yes," he answered, decidedly. "Only prettier, as I say, and nicer, and it's all so much more attractive because of the surroundings and your working in a bookbindery."

"Do you know," she interrupted, "that is what surprised me. You are like the men in the play at the theater."

"Which?" he asked.

"The kind," she said, "who always have a valet and a club. That is the kind that you are like."

"And it's the sort you admire?"

"No! No!" she answered, readily. "I think that a man should do something—be something—if—if——"

"Only a gas-fitter," he laughed.

"But if he is a good gas-fitter, that is being something, isn't it?" she asked, seriously? "And I can respect him."

"It seems to me," he answered, "that we are a couple of Socialists, insisting that we are as good as our betters."

"But there aren't any—betters," she maintained. "That is just it. All are good, and people are only worse because they are ignorant. And so it is the duty of every one to do everything possible to overcome ignorance and make people better, and bring them together—the rich and the poor."

"So that gas-fitters will be talking to millionairesses, and young women in book-binderies to young men who have valets and clubs."

"And why not?" she said, boldly. "I am sure that if a man were a nice gas-fitter, with good manners and intelligence and education, he could very well talk to millionairesses nowadays. Indeed, a capable gas-fitter is more, and makes more money, and gets it in a more honorable way, than a good many men who do talk to millionairesses, and marry them, too."

"What a terrible little democrat you are!"

"But didn't you say that you believed that people could be pretty and nice, though they were poor?"

"I am absolutely and perfectly convinced of it," said Rothes, with decision and meaning.

Rothes left the room knowing that all the happiness the world held for him was shut up in it. He was more and more assured of this at every repetition of the ceremony of tea-taking, for that cup was not the last that he received, but rather the first of many. Each time that he departed he went to pace the streets in perplexity. Not that he cared what the world would say; but could she be made happy in the new life to which he would take her or remain only bewildered and helpless? And would she let him lead her thither? He was by no means sure of this. Though he had seen her glances of kindly interest, he had noticed, too, a rather frightened look at times—caught a tone of dismay in her voice. But she must come. What a life for such a one to lead—a life of work and privation! He watched, and as he did this he thought that he learned much. Her eyes grew less bright, she was thinner. He observed, too, that she often appeared very thoughtful and sad.

One evening, as he was returning from one of his long perambulatory conflicts of mind, he passed a corner well known in the neighborhood. There was, to be sure, nothing to be seen but a low, dingy shop with a dirty window in which was an incongruous collection of objects. Opening on a small side street or alley was a half-hidden side door, and as Rothes passed he saw Miss Collins slip through it and dart down the steps, advancing with such speed that she almost ran into him as he stood still.

"You!" she exclaimed, looking up.

"Yes," he said gravely. "And very glad to see you, as it is rather late for you to be out."

"There was some—thing that I had to do," she murmured.

"Do You Know, I Have Never Known a Gas-Fitter Like You."

"At a pawnshop?" he asked.

"Yes," she faltered.

"If you wanted anything," he continued almost sternly, "why didn't you tell me?"

"Why should I?" she replied, almost defiantly.

"Haven't we known each other for a long time?"—and it seemed to him that really they had—"aren't we neighbors and friends?"

"Yes," she replied, in a low tone.

"And shouldn't friends help each other?"

"But I couldn't take anything from you."

"Why not?" he asked impatiently. "In this real world, where women and men work together, they should share together and help each offer like good comrades."

"But it is different," she pleaded.

"Why?" he demanded. "Why can't I help you if I can?"

They stood in the dark hall of the tenement house now, and the noise of the street came shrilly to them through the opening where no door closed them out.

"I couldn't let you."

"And why couldn't you," he said authoritatively, as he captured her hands, "when you need it?"

"Oh, you are so good," she exclaimed. "And you are out of work yourself. I have watched you. And you want to give to me out of the little that you must have."

"Nonsense," he answered brusquely. "I am a man and can take care of myself. But you are a woman of whom a man should be taking care."

"Women can take care of themselves nowadays," she said with a momentary smile.

"They can't, and they shouldn't if they could," he replied stoutly. "You see that you can't and you shouldn't. You shall not be allowed to go on like this. You are getting thinner and paler. I can see it. And I won't have it. You must let me help you, and you must give me the chance and the right to do it."

"How can that be?" she almost whispered.

"You must marry me," he said quickly, "and then——"

"Oh," she cried, as if in fright, as she wrenched her hand away from his strong grasp. "You mustn't say such a thing. You do not know what you are saying. I must not listen to you."

She turned and ran rapidly up the stairs.

"Oh, believe me," she cried, as she paused on an upper step. "Don't think I am ungrateful. I never was so grateful to anyone. Never! Never! I never thought that anyone could be so good and kind. I am so thankful that I must not see you. I should have sent you away——"

"I wouldn't have gone," he answered briefly.

"——or gone myself," she panted on. "Oh, it is impossible—impossible. And still!"—she hid her face in her hands—"I love to think that you might have helped me. I shall love to dream of it often. I shall—always."

Then she turned, and in an instant was lost in the darkness above. He thundered up after her, but she was too swift in her flight, and when he reached her door it was shut. He stood for a moment irresolute. After a moment's thought he concluded that he could see her in the morning, when she might be less determined, and went slowly away.

On the following day, at the earliest hour that he thought that he could make such a visit—and the hours of the quarter were not the hours of a less occupied society—he once more stood before her door. All doubt had vanished. His natural obstinacy had come to aid his determination. He would have her now. He reviewed the arguments that he would use. He considered how he would appeal to her.

The hinges creaked and the figure of the elderly woman was before him.

"Miss Collins?" he asked propitiatingly.

"She's gone," said the woman, shortly, as she stood squarely in front of him.

"I want to see her."

"Ye can't."

"When will she be back?"

"I can't tell ye."

"But it's most important," he said, resolutely. "I saw where she was last night. I want to do something. She need not know."

"We're no beggars," snapped the woman.

"No," replied Rothes gently. "But you will help me to help her."

"Young man," announced the woman, "I think ye've been too much about here already. If she's gone, it's a good thing at last. An' it'll be a good thing for ye to go, too."

The door was shut sharply in his face and Rothes stood staring disconsolately at the cracked paint of the panels.

He waited all that day and the next. Not a glimpse could he catch of the figure flitting through the halls—not a sound of that light footfall that he knew so well. He grew more and more restless. From one place he fidgeted to another. He could learn nothing. No one anywhere seemed to know anything about the fugitive. She had not been long in the house. Now she had gone. She was a mystery and appeared likely to remain one.

While the "cousin" did not go, Rothes could not help believing that she would return—that, by staying there himself, he should in some way receive information of her. At least, that was the point of departure—the one place where it seemed to him that there would be any chance of hearing from her. He did not wait patiently. Again he roamed the streets and the darkness knew him for one of its many watchers.

Late one night at about this time Rothes found himself waiting in the luxurious library of his uncle Horace Bilson's luxurious apartments. The confidential valet had some difficulty in recognizing him, but, being satisfied at length, admitted him with respectful protest in every glance and shocked remonstrance in every gesture. As Rothes watched the cheerful blaze in the fireplace he reflected how horrified his uncle would be. He remembered his indignation when he had disclosed his project to him in the club window.

"Hide yourself in the slums!" gasped that scandalized elderly gentleman. "See what life is really like! Have a chance to do something for some one!"

Uncle Horace clung to the arms of his comfortable chair, as if clinging to the crumbling realties of life.

"You see," said Rothes airily. "I'm tired to death of all this." And he waved his hand to indicate the glittering afternoon avenue to be seen through the window of the pleasant room in which they sat.

"But I never heard of such a thing," Uncle Horace objected confidently.

"I want to get out and discover something real. The box seat of my coach is pretty high, but one can't see all the world from it after all."

"This is rank socialism!" remonstrated Uncle Horace.

"And if it is," Rothes replied. "Beside," he went on, "Aunt Marcia is at it again."

"In what way?" asked the elderly gentleman apprehensively.

"She's found another girl that she wants me to marry. Such a pearl! Such an angel! And I won't have it. She made my life miserable with the way that she forced the last one on me, and I am going to escape Miss Rosamond Langdale or perish in the attempt."

"What!" Uncle Horace asked eagerly. "The girl who has all old Stephen Langdale's millions and has been making such a stir in England?"

"All of that and more," responded Rothes. "Who's been talked about and written about until she is a public character. I know the kind; with no thought but for this life from which I want to get away."

"I've always understood that she was very—unconventional."

"Worse and worse," exclaimed Rothes. "That's sure to mean that she will run with the fast lot. No, there's only one way to escape Aunt Marcia and her machinations, and that is to hide myself where I can't be found, and the only way to do that is just here in New York."

Rothes thought of this as he sat gazing into the fire, waiting for Uncle Horace to return. He was a rough-looking figure, and when that amiable diner-out opened the door and entered he drew back in some alarm.

"I saw in the newspapers that you were in town and stopped for a moment," said Rothes, turning.

Somewhat reassured by the voice, Uncle Horace advanced slowly and cautiously.

"Haven't you given up this folly yet?" asked the startled elderly gentleman, his indignation increased by his momentary fright. "Haven't you lost enough of your time with it already?"

"Not a bit," replied Rothes promptly. "Not when I've found what I have."

"What's that?" asked the other anxiously.

"She! She!" cried Rothes.

"You've fallen in love with some one—there?" exclaimed Uncle Horace in consternation.

"She works in a bookbindery," Rothes replied maliciously.

"Oh!" groaned the uncle. "This is a case for a conseil de famille—only there isn't any family. This is the time for a lettre-de-cachet—only we haven't such blessed things nowadays."

"I thought that I'd come and tell you, so that you could wish me joy."

"Is it all settled?" wailed the other.

"No," answered Rothes. "In fact it's as far from settled as possible. Indeed, I feel quite sure that she does not want me, and the strict truth is that she has disappeared and that I can't find her."

"If only you can't," said Uncle Horace fervidly.

"But I will," Rothes replied firmly. "I'll search the earth for her."

Uncle Horace groaned.

"And I've seen Miss Rosamond Langdale," he went on, "and she is charming—charming."

In the "slums" the gas was lit earlier in the afternoon, and the shop doors shut to keep out the colder wind. The winter was coming. Where was she, Rothes kept asking himself. If she were in want—if she were suffering! The thought drove him to desperation in his powerlessness. And then, when he had almost given up all hope, he thought that he saw her.

In the dusk of a late autumn afternoon, driven by his restlessness, he had ventured farther than usual from the districts that he was accustomed to frequent. Trusting to his disguise and the growing darkness, he had wandered as far as the region of the theaters, the picture exhibitions, and the flower shops. There, standing in the obscurity of a doorway, he saw a brougham drive up to the curb. A footman, who had been waiting, sprang forward and opened the door as an elderly lady slowly came forward. He knew her well. Old Mrs. Frobsher, one of the stanchest and firmest old conservatives of the town. Then a young woman, who had been delayed, darted forward. She passed in a moment. But Rothes started. His heart stood still. For a moment he did not breathe. It was she. And even as he thought this, he told himself how impossible it was. How could she be there in all the finery of a great lady, entering that perfectly appointed equipage—accompanying the strict and exacting old Mrs. Frobsher. It was the darkness, he argued, aided by his constant thought of her, that had wrought the vision. Clearly he must have been mistaken. Some slight similarity of feature, some single likeness of movement had misled him.

But the sudden belief for an instant that he saw her before him, strengthened him in his determination to find her. There were ways of discovering lost persons—people who made it a business to do it. Why had he not tried them before? As he returned late to his room he decided that the first thing that he would do on the following day would be to make use of some such means of discovering her.

Again he started. He sprang to his feet. He heard a slight sound. It was a very light footfall, but he could not believe that he was mistaken in it. Was she really again coming up the stairs?

Going to the door he tore it open. In the darkness he could see nothing. He knew that he could not be mistaken. Still he wished for greater certainty—the certainty of absolute knowledge—of sight of her. There was but one way. To go directly to her door. Two steps at a time he sprang up the stairs. As he knocked he realized, with a great wave of despair, what a bitter disappointment it would be to him if she had not come after all. And then the door opened and—she stood before him. She was dressed as she had been when he picked up the potatoes for her. In an instant the vision that he thought that he had seen was dissipated. She stood before him, Nettie Collins—the girl of the people, but dearer to him than ever.

"Oh!" she gasped.

"Yes," he said, joyfully. "And you are back. I am glad, glad—terrifically glad. You don't know what it has been——"

"I should not have come back," she cried.

"And why?" he said, forcing his way past her. "I must speak to you."

"I am all alone."

"So much the better," he said. "I knew how I needed you before you went, but your going has shown me more. You shall not escape again."

"I must go. I shall go," she cried. "I cannot listen to you. There are reasons."

"There are no reasons that cannot be overcome," he replied. "If you like me, if you care for me a little—love me——"

"I—I do."

"Which?" he asked eagerly.

"Like you," she murmured.

"And care for me a little?"

"And care for you a little," she repeated with docility.

"And," he urged, "the rest?"

Then she turned suddenly, listening.

"Hush," she said, frightened. From the street came confused shouts—the mingled tumult of a sudden commotion.

"Answer me," he said impatiently.

"Something is happening," she insited.

And they heard above the vague dull rumors distant shouts. "Fire!"

Almost at the same moment he caught the smell of burning wool and saw the hall grow dim with smoke.

"It's here," she said.

"Answer me," he commanded.

"The house is on fire," she cried, and ran to the door.

He followed her and, as he advanced, he saw thick smoke clouds rolling up from the opening of the stairs.

"We must go up," he shouted.

Driving her before him, he raced after her to the upper hallway. At the end was a window. Stepping to it, he glanced down at the street, a dizzy depth below them. A considerable crowd was already collected and was gazing at the flames bursting from the lower part of the building. As the people saw him, they raised a sudden shout.

"There must be some way to the roof," he called to her.

"Here is a door," she answered quickly.

He grasped the handle and shook it. The lock was fast and there was no key. From the stairs up which they had just escaped the smoke followed them in increasing volume.

"We're lost!" she exclaimed.

"But you havent told me," he said, turning from the door.

"What?" she asked wildly.

"The rest," he answered.

"Yes—yes. The rest too," she cried. "I was going to tell you when the alarm came. I do. I do. I love."

He held her in his arms.

"I know it now," she sobbed. "I knew it then. I have really known it always. I came back really to tell you."

"And you love me?" he repeated.

"I do," she answered slowly. "There is nothing—but you." She put her hand in his and repeated: "Whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodges I sha'l lodge; thy people shall be my people and thy God my God! What is all the rest of the world?"

"It's a good deal to me—now," he said firmly. "And the first thing is to get out of this."

He saw her only dimly in the thickening smoke. He turned to the door again, but it would not yield. Then he drew back and, with a rush and heave, fell against the panels. The wood broke before him, and the door fell, torn from its hinges. Up the dark, narrow stairs she ran, after he had thrust her forward, only to be stopped by the closed scuttle at the top.

Outside they heard men calling.

"All right," he shouted to her. "They know that we are here."

But, impatient with the delay, he put his shoulders against the obstruction and bore up against it. The boards yielded, and they sprang out upon the roof as the firemen hurried up.

"All right," Rothes cried. "Go on. We can take care of ourselves."

He carried her to a dark place behind a stack of chimneys, holding her motionless and silent in his arms. At last she opened her eyes. The air was deliciously clear and pure about them. Above, the stairs shone brilliantly. The tumult of the street seemed afar off and almost lulling in its effect.

"We are safe," she said.

"Safe. Yes, perfectly safe. Doubly safe," he answered. "For we have life and I have you. Dearest," he said, and he kissed her; "I am going to make you glad that I have you. And I can. You don't know. I am not what you think I am. I am what the world calls rich—very rich. I never was so glad of it before. I came here to see if I could not do something for somebody else, and I have done the best thing in the world for myself. I have found you. But I am somebody else. You may even have heard of me. I am Sigourney Rothes."

She gazed at him, rubbing her eyes, still smarting with the smoke. Then she laughed.

"Oh," she cried, "I am so glad. But it is too funny. The man from whom I have been running away."

"Of course. I know," he said, somewhat puzzled. "I thought that you were lost."

"I don't mean that," she said. "But by coming here at all. Oh, I'm so glad, not that you are Sigourney Rothes—that you are so rich—but that I am not the only imposter. I am not Nettie Collins; I am Rosamond Langdale." And she said mockingly: "Perhaps you may even have heard of me?"

"You?" he cried. "But I was running away from you too."

"I came as you did," she said, "to escape from the life of which I was so tired, and to try to do some good. I brought my old nurse Sarah with me. Oh, I know that I loved you from the first, but it seemed as if it would not do. I went away to try in my other life to forget. But this afternoon, as I was getting into the carriage, I saw you standing in a doorway. You looked so poor and miserable my heart gave a great bound and went out to you. Oh, you carried it away with you and I followed it down here."

"And you were never in want?"

"Of course not," she laughed.

"And the pawnshop?" he asked.

"I had been getting a ring that a poor girl had pawned to take it back to her."

Again in the darkness he took her in his arms and kissed her. The drone of the working fire-engines came up to them. The shouts of the firemen as they made their way over the roofs of the houses fell upon their ears, but they did not hear them. They did not know where they were. Unconscious of place, alone on the roof among the chimneys, he held her against his heart.

"I'm glad it's so," he said.

"And I'm glad," she answered, "to know that it wouldn't have made any difference if it hadn't been."